



SHERYL L. SPILLER
Director

County of Los Angeles
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SOCIAL SERVICES

12860 CROSSROADS PARKWAY SOUTH • CITY OF INDUSTRY, CALIFORNIA 91746
Tel (562) 908-8400 • Fax (562) 695-4801



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PRESS RELEASE

Contact: Shirley Christensen (562) 908-8311
James Bolden (562) 908-8521

CLARIFYING THE 'PUBLIC CHARGE' ISSUE

**FEDERAL, STATE AND COUNTY OFFICIALS HOST COMMUNITY
FORUM TO DISPEL MISPERCEPTIONS REGARDING CALFRESH**

Officials: "Applying for CalFresh food assistance won't hurt immigration status"

LOS ANGELES – L.A. County Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) Director, Sheryl L. Spiller, today joined federal and state officials to dispel misinformation that applying for "CalFresh," the federally-funded supplemental nutrition food benefit, will negatively impact one's immigrant status or opportunity to become a permanent resident or U.S. Citizen.

The legal issue referred to as "Public Charge," is one of the leading reasons why legal immigrants who are in need and may be eligible for CalFresh food assistance for themselves or their children, are hesitant to apply.

Formerly known as Food Stamps, CalFresh provides access to healthy and nutritious food for low-income families, serving as the first line of defense against food insecurity, malnutrition and hunger. The purpose of today's forum was to dispel common misperceptions regarding the CalFresh application process and reinforce that CalFresh is not a "public cash assistance program," but rather a supplementary, nutrition-based food assistance program.

"Misinformation regarding CalFresh Program eligibility requirements, immigration consequences, and program regulations, are still common in communities throughout L.A. County and the State of California," Spiller told those gathered at the forum. "At the same time," she added, "the need for food assistance has never been greater."

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Spiller was joined at the East Los Angeles Civic Center by Brian K. Tam, Chief, CalFresh Management Operations for the California Department of Social Services (CDSS); Martha Flores, Los Angeles Field Office Chief of Staff (District 23) for the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS); and Sandra Engel, JD, Immigration Counselor for Catholic Charities of Los Angeles.

The United States Department of Agriculture reports that the number of U.S. homes lacking adequate food more than tripled in the last four years. In L.A. County, while over 1.1 million people (this includes nearly 645,000 children) are participating in CalFresh, it's estimated that only 55 percent of eligible individuals are actually participating in the program.

"This means that hundreds of households are struggling to put food on their tables each day. These are families that are in immediate need of assistance and many are simply unaware that the CalFresh Program can help them," Spiller said. "Others are dissuaded to apply because of a historical stigma associated with the program or a misunderstanding relative to the issue of Public Charge."

The public forum was part of the continued community outreach of "CalFresh Awareness Month," a comprehensive and coordinated campaign by DPSS and a broad-based community collaborative to reduce hunger in the County.

For more information, visit <http://dpss.lacounty.gov/dpss/calfresh> or call the Health and Nutrition Hotline at 1 (866) 613-3777.

ABOUT CALFRESH AWARENESS MONTH

Coordinated by DPSS and a broad-based community collaborative, CalFresh Awareness Month has become one of the most comprehensive and coordinated efforts in the State of California to bring awareness to the need for the federally-funded supplemental nutrition food benefit that helps low-income families and individuals in the County.

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